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SUBJECT: MODEL ANTI-TIP EFFORTS IN SOUTHEASTERN COTE

D'IVOIRE

- 11. (U) SUMMARY: The Government of Cote d'Ivoire (GoCI) has implemented a robust and comprehensive program to combat trafficking in persons (TIP) in the southeastern part of the country, with technical and financial assistance from the German development agency GTZ. The southeast is a major transport corridor with neighboring Ghana and vulnerable to traffickers who transport victims from Ghana, Nigeria, Togo, and Benin. Despite the program's success, however, GTZ's financial and technical assistance is ending this year. Government officials not only want to continue existing programs, but expand beyond their current reach. Because GoCI funds for the 2007-2009 National Action Plan Against Trafficking and Child Labor have not been disbursed yet to fill the gap, there is a risk of losing momentum. END SUMMARY
- 12. (U) Poloff traveled to Aboisso and Noe (the main overland border crossing with Ghana) from April 23-24 to discuss TIP issues with relevant officials. Government officials in the region have received extensive training on trafficking in persons and are actively working to combat it with the resources at their disposal. With assistance from GTZ, officials have implemented a multi-pronged three year anti-TIP program which has yielded important accomplishments since activities were undertaken in September 2006.

MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- 13. (U) Under the anti-TIP program, government officials have organized, established, and staffed 30 anti-TIP village committees, 5 sub-regional committees, and 1 head departmental committee. All of these anti-TIP vigilance committees actively refer TIP cases to the proper authorities as soon as they are discovered and serve as a protection and referral network covering the entire southeastern region. Unlike anti-TIP committees established elsewhere in the country, government authorities have institutionalized these committees through official decrees, ensuring that they do not disappear when key officials leave for other posts. The committees also organize the training of new officials to ensure continuous, uninterrupted support for anti-TIP efforts.
- ¶4. (U) Since the project began, government officials have sensitized villages most vulnerable to TIP. The head departmental committee based in Aboisso has taken the lead, conducting over 200 public anti-TIP sensitization sessions and constructing over 30 large, public billboards in cities and villages across the region. The billboards are posted in prominent entry and exit points to each village or town and encourage the local population to "SAY NO" to TIP. This same message has also been disseminated through radio interviews with departmental committee members. The programs are broadcast in French and in local languages. The sensitization efforts have had a significant impact: the Aboisso departmental committee reports that villagers across the region now immediately call their village or sub-regional TIP committee if they spot people they suspect of trafficking children.
- 15. (U) The departmental committee has also dipped into government coffers to subsidize the training of 16 young female trafficking victims. The girls are learning sewing,

housekeeping, and hairdressing under the tutelage of partners the committee identified and selected within the community. The committee also supervised the construction of a government-financed shelter that was built with money from the Aboisso General Council. The Council is responsible for envisioning and implementing development projects in the city. Although construction of the center has been completed, it is not yet functional due to a lack of equipment (i.e. furniture, mattresses, light fixtures, etc). When properly equipped, the two stand-alone buildings will be able to house approximately 35 victims. Until recently, victims had been housed in a Methodist boarding house. Renovations to convert this facility into a commercial lodging establishment, however, have left the government without a reliable option for housing trafficking victims.

CHALLENGES REMAIN

- 16. (U) Local government officials in Aboisso say that even with GTZ's assistance, they still do not have a sufficient number of vehicles, educational materials, megaphones, and computers to properly respond to the population's needs. Village committees are especially short of money and find it difficult to regularly assemble all of the committee members, as they must use their personal funds to travel to meetings. Aboisso officials said that although GTZ was very pleased with government efforts, it will not renew the project unless the government promises to earmark more of its own money to fight TIP. For this reason, the Aboisso General Council has tried to use the meager funds it has to support anti-TIP related projects.
- 17. (U) The police commissioner working at the Noe Border expressed concern that the GTZ project is coming to a close. When trafficking cases are intercepted at the border, he said law enforcement agents immediately call GTZ representatives in Aboisso because there are no facilities to house trafficking victims at the border. In the rare instances when border police have intercepted children suspected of being trafficked, the children have spent the night in a spare conference room until GTZ could pick them up and bring them to Aboisso. Because Noe police are not equipped to house or feed children, buses that are suspected of trafficking children are sometimes turned away at the border. Commissioner Goze said that most of the children intercepted are from Nigeria or Togo.

COMMENT

18. (U) Government officials have made significant progress on combating the TIP problem in southeastern Cote d'Ivoire. The departmental committee told Poloff, for example, that efforts have been so successful that TIP activity has decreased in the region covered by the program and increased in adjacent regions, as traffickers attempt to avoid the greater Aboisso area. The head departmental committee in Aboisso is particularly committed to fighting TIP, and core members have traveled around the country to share their experiences and lessons learned with other fledgling committees. As the departmental committee is one of the few committees that has successfully mobilized both government and international funds for TIP-related projects, committee members are hoping that earmarked funding from the 2007-2009 National Action Plan Against Trafficking can be combined with international donor support so they can continue to build on their efforts. Given the current election-related demands on the national budget, however, disbursement doesn't seem likely in the near future.